

Some Philosophical Uses of “to be” in Plato

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I here discuss two sets of passages where Plato uses the verb εἶναι (and its nominal forms ὄν and οὐσία) in a philosophically loaded way, in connection with the notion of truth. I suggest that the systematic nature of this connection has not been recognized and hence its philosophical significance has not been properly understood.

Syntactically, the passages in question are a mixed bag. In a few cases we have what I call the *veridical construction* with a subject of sentential rather than nominal form: the verb is construed absolutely (no further predicate is expressed or understood), and it is syntactically linked to a clause of thinking or saying.¹ In other cases where the subject (or implied subject) is a noun phrase, an absolute construction of the verb may bear an existential sense. Most often, however, εἶναι will function as copula with predicate adjective, noun, or prepositional phrase.

In cases where no predicate is expressed, there has been a tendency of late to describe the use of the verb as “incomplete” and to construe it as an elliptical copula, i.e. to interpret an expression of the form *X is* as elliptical for *X is Y*, where the value of *Y* is either specified by the context or left quite general.² I do not want to deny the appropriateness of such an interpretation in many cases, perhaps in most. But I want to insist that the uses of εἶναι in Plato (as in Greek generally) are often *overdetermined*: several grammatical readings of a single occurrence are not only possible but sometimes required for the full understanding of the text. (Whether or not fallacy arises from such ambiguity is a question that must be considered separately for each case.)

Even where the syntax is unambiguous, a copula use of the verb may bear a veridical value, that is to say, it may serve to call attention to the truth claim that is implicit in every declarative sentence. This function of the verb, which I have elsewhere called the veridical *nuance* or veridical *lexical value*, is not so clearly defined a notion as the veridical construction. It is unmistakable in those cases where a use of εἶναι is naturally translated as “is true”, “is so”, or “is the case”; but these are typically not copula constructions. In the copula use a veridical nuance emerges whenever there is any contrast between being so and seeming so, between being *really* such-and-such and being only *called* such-and-such or *believed to be* such-

and-such. Just as in the veridical construction proper there is an explicit comparison between a clause with εἶναι and a clause with a verb of saying or thinking, so in the wider range of uses with veridical nuance there is a contrast, expressed or implied, between how things *are* and how they *seem*: i.e. how they are said or believed to be. The classical example of this is a line from Aeschylus:

οὐ γὰρ δοκεῖν ἄριστος, ἀλλ' εἶναι θέλει.

“He wants not to appear but to be the noblest”.

(*Septem* 592)³

Parallels from other languages make clear that this veridical value for εἶναι is an inheritance from Indo-European, where the verb and its participle **sant-* seem to have been used in juridical contexts for “the facts of the case” or the person who is *really the culprit* and not merely accused or suspected.⁴ So in a context of inquiry τὸ ὄν signifies “the fact” or the truth one is trying to get at. This range of idiomatic uses reflects (or explains) the role of εἶναι as privileged signal for the truth claim that is implicit in the indicative form of every declarative sentence.⁵ Thus the minimal case of a veridical value for ἐστί is simply an emphatic assertion.

Let me briefly illustrate these points from Aristotle, before turning to Plato. We have the veridical construction proper in *Met.* Γ 7, where Aristotle defines truth as saying of what-is *that it is* and of what-is-not *that it is not*, and falsehood conversely:

τὸ μὲν γὰρ λέγειν τὸ ὄν μὴ εἶναι ἢ τὸ μὴ ὄν εἶναι ψεῦδος, τὸ δὲ τὸ ὄν εἶναι καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν μὴ εἶναι ἀληθές (1011b26-27).

Here the participial forms (“what is” and “what-is-not”) refer to states of affairs in the world, to positive and negative facts as it were, while the infinitival clauses (“that it is”, “that it is not”) represent the propositional content asserted: what is *said* to be the case. I see no trace of the copula construction here, no suggestion that a predicate is to be supplied or understood for “to be”.

In *Met.* Δ 7, on the other hand, the use of εἶναι to signify truth (ὅτι ἀληθές) is illustrated by an ordinary copula construction, with the verb in the emphatic initial position: ὅτι ἔστι Σωκράτης μουσικός, ὅτι ἀληθές τοῦτο. Word order is of rhetorical rather than grammatical significance in Greek, and an initial ἔστι does not in general call for a veridical interpretation.⁶ What Aristotle tells us (and what we might not otherwise guess) is that he recognizes the veridical idea, the distinct expression of a truth claim, in a standard copula use of ἐστί, at least when that use is sufficiently emphatic. Or perhaps we should say that Aristotle reads ἐστί here twice: once as

copula (“Socrates is musical”) and once as veridical sentence-operator (“*It is true that* Socrates is musical”). For in his negative example τὸ δ’ οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ διάμετρος σύμμετρος, ὅτι ψεῦδος, where the negation can be read either internally (“the diagonal is not commensurate”) or externally (“it is not the case that the diagonal is commensurate”), the latter reading seems to be indicated by Aristotle’s own statement ὅτι ψεῦδος: (“this means) that it is a falsehood (sc. to say *that it is commensurate*)”. If, following this clue, we read the veridical sentence-operator into the copula construction here, we have a clear case of what I call overdetermination: a single occurrence of the verb that requires two readings for a full understanding.

I

My first set of Platonic passages involves the terminology of the doctrine of Forms in four different dialogues. In the first example, from the *Lysis*, that doctrine is itself not stated but some of the relevant terminology is introduced, probably for the first time.

(1) At *Lysis* 219C the regress of one-thing-dear-for-the-sake-of-another is broken by the prospect of reaching “an ἀρχή which will no longer refer us to something else dear, but we will arrive at *that which is primarily dear* (ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἐστιν πρῶτον φίλον), for the sake of which we say all other things are dear”. The pronoun ἐκεῖνο with the phrase ὃ ἐστιν introducing the name or predicate for a Form will become a familiar part of the later terminology, which is also anticipated here in the comparison of many other dear things to images (εἰδωλα) of the one primary φίλον (219 D 3). Our present interest lies, however, less in the anticipation of things to come than in the veridical value placed upon the copula construction ὃ ἐστιν. This value would not be clear from the first occurrence just cited from 219 C 7; but it is brought out in the sequel by the contrast between the deceptive images and their original, “that primary thing, which is truly dear” (ἐκεῖνο τὸ πρῶτον, ὃ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐστι φίλον, 219 D 4-5).⁷ And the same value is reasserted in the opposition between “what is really dear” (τὸ τῷ ὄντι φίλον 220 B 1 and B 4) and those things which are dear for the sake of something else and hence only nominally dear (ῥήματα φαινόμεθα λέγοντες αὐτό B 1). Plato’s future doctrine of eponymy, that particulars are “named after” the Forms in which they participate (*Phaedo* 78 E 2, 102 B 2), is here adumbrated, and the notion of truth is introduced in a way that is also characteristically Platonic: to a descriptive term or predicate “F” (in this case “φίλον”) there corresponds a unique entity of which this term is true without qualification; the term applies to other things derivatively, in virtue of their

relation to this privileged paradigm (which is here called “the primary F”; in later dialogues it will be “the F itself”).

(2) *Symposium* 210E: in his first dazzling but sharply focussed statement of the standard doctrine, Plato introduces us to a single Form, in a sudden vision of “something beautiful of a marvellous nature, that very thing (τοῦτο ἐκεῖνο) *for the sake of which* our previous labors were undertaken”. The description opens with a good example of the overdetermined or overworked use of εἶναι: πρῶτον μὲν αἰεὶ ὄν . . . ἔπειτα οὐ τῇ μὲν καλόν, τῇ δ’ αἰσχρόν, οὐδὲ τοτὲ μὲν, τοτὲ δὲ οὐ, . . . The participle ὄν naturally takes the strong “existential” value with αἰεὶ (“is eternally”, “is forever”), echoing the Homeric formula θεοὶ αἰὲν ἔόντες and immediately paralleled not only by οὔτε γιγνόμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον but also by οὔτε αὐξάνόμενον οὔτε φθίνον, which do not take the predicative construction. Initially, then, there is no reason to construe the participle as copula, incomplete or otherwise. But of course it does provide the verb of predication on which to hang the following antithetical phrases. (And so we have ὥς τισὶ μὲν ὄν καλόν at 211 A 5). Hence, the predicative phrases τῇ μὲν καλόν, πρὸς μὲν τὸ καλόν, etc. in the rest of the sentence do permit us to go back and see that αἰεὶ ὄν can be read not only as “this beautiful thing is forever” but also as “this thing is forever beautiful.” The existential use in αἰεὶ ὄν is pregnant with the incomplete copula. But it would be a mistake to *eliminate* the first construal in favor of the second, since we would then lose not only the Homeric overtones but the rhetorical balance with the immediately following participles. We must recognize both the absolute construction (explicitly) and the copula syntax (implicitly) as part of the total meaning of the text. And so likewise for αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ μεθ’ αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς αἰεὶ ὄν at 211 B 1-2: both “it is always uniform” and also “it is eternal, exists forever.”

At 211 C 7-D1 we encounter the ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἐστὶ formula familiar from the *Lysis*: ἐπ’ ἐκεῖνο τὸ μάθημα τελευτῆσαι, ὃ ἐστὶν οὐκ ἄλλου ἢ αὐτοῦ ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ μάθημα, καὶ γινώ αὐτὸ τελευτῶν. ὃ ἐστὶ καλόν.⁸ “(One passes from beautiful studies) to come finally to *that very study which is* study of nothing but *that very Beautiful itself*, and one ends by knowing this, (namely) what *is* beautiful”, or perhaps: “*what beautiful is.*” There is an ambiguity in the syntax of ὃ ἐστὶ καλόν which we shall find again in the *Phaedo*: καλόν may be construed either as subject or as predicate with ἐστὶ. The predicate syntax is favored by the parallel with μάθημα above and by the absence of the article with καλόν. (But compare *Phaedo* 65 D 4, cited below, where δίκαιον αὐτό without the article must be subject.) Since we have, in effect, an “is” of definitional equivalence, the distinction between subject and predicate is of no logical significance.⁹ It is important that the

term following ἐστὶ does *not* take the article, and thus preserves its form as a predicate (as G. E. L. Owen has pointed out); and this remains true even if one wanted to construe it here as grammatical subject, on the analogy with the what-is-X? question: “to know what beautiful is” would be to know the full sense of the term, and perhaps its privileged reference as well (i.e. the entity of which it is uniquely true). If καλόν is taken as predicate, ἐστὶ should carry a strong veridical charge: “to know (the beautiful) itself, the one thing that is *truly* beautiful.” (Compare ὁ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐστι φίλον above from *Lysis* 219 D 5.) The account of the vision ends in any case with an emphasis on the notion of truth: the philosophical initiate “begets not images of virtue, since he has not been in contact with an image, but true virtue, since he has been in contact with truth” (τὸ ἀληθές 212 A 5).

(3) In the fuller statement of the doctrine of Forms in the *Phaedo*, the first mention of Forms is preceded by the question: “when does the soul grasp truth?” (ἀλήθεια 65 B 9). The veridical value of the participles which follow (τὰ ὄντα 65 C 3, τὸ ὄν C 9), and the systematic exchange between τὰ ὄντα (66 A 3), τὸ ὄν (66 A 8, C 2) and ἀλήθεια (66 A 6), τὸ ἀληθές (66 B 7, D 7, 67 B 1) in this connection was correctly noted by Burnet and has been discussed elsewhere.¹⁰ Throughout this passage the participle is construed absolutely, with the sense of “truth” or “true reality”, as the object sought in the philosopher’s quest for knowledge (cf. ζητήσις at 65 A 10, σκοπεῖν at B 10, ζητεῖ at D 1, etc.). This is the ordinary notion of truth associated with any inquiry into “the facts”; Plato’s terminology here differs from Herodotus’ use of τὸ ἐόν only by the strongly theoretical context in which it is embedded. A more technical formulation begins to appear at 65 D 4: φαμέν τι εἶναι δίκαιον αὐτὸ ἢ οὐδέν; “Do we say that (the) just itself is something or nothing?”¹¹ Note that the claim of existence is expressed by the grammatical copula: to exist is to be *something*. Veridical idea, existence claim, and predicative syntax are all taken up in the nominalization of the verb οὐσία at 65 D 13, in Plato’s first generalized reference to the Forms: “(I am speaking) of the being (οὐσία) of all those things, what each one really is”, (περὶ) ἀπάντων τῆς οὐσίας ὃ τυγχάνει ἕκαστον ὄν. The phrase ὃ τυγχάνει ὄν is a strengthened version of ὃ ἐστὶ which seems to underscore its veridical force (“what a given thing really is”, Burnet: “what each one actually is”, Gallop). The question whether ἕκαστον is subject or predicate of the copula is probably as unanswerable here as at *Symp.* 211 C 8. To speak of *what F is* or of *what is (truly) F* for Plato, to speak of the same thing.

We can say that the formula ὃ ἐστὶ represents an “is” of equivalence in a formula for essence, an answer to the Socratic request for a definition, like

Aristotle's τὸ τί ἐστὶ or τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι. But it would be misleading to say that οὐσία here means "essence"; it is simply a nominalization for the various uses of εἶναι, among which ὁ ἐστὶ will emerge as the most important.

The doctrine stated at 65 D is developed systematically from 74 A-B with the introduction of αὐτὸ τὸ ἴσον. We begin by recognizing the existence of such an entity (with the copula construction as at 65 D 4: φῶμέν τι εἶναι ἢ μηδέν; 74 A 12 "Do we say it is something or nothing?"), followed by the indirect question with ὁ ἐστὶ: "And do we know what it is?" ἢ καὶ ἐπισταμεθα αὐτὸ ὃ ἐστίν;¹² The phrase "what it is" (ὃ ἐστίν) is then used with the article as a technical label for the Form: "do equal sticks and the like seem to us to be equal in the same way as the *what-it-is* itself" (οὕτως ἴσα εἶναι ὥσπερ αὐτὸ τὸ ὃ ἐστίν, 74 D 6). And so in a second technical or frozen use at 75 B 1: the sensible equals strive after ἐκείνου τοῦ ὃ ἐστίν ἴσον, "that very *what-is-equal*", in a phrase where the subject-predicate construction of ἴσον is again indeterminate. But the underlying syntax of an indirect question after "to know" immediately reappears at 75 B 6: "having acquired knowledge of the equal itself, <sc. knowledge of> what it is" (εἰληφότες ἐπιστήμην αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἴσου ὅτι ἐστίν).

Plato thus moves deliberately back and forth between idiomatic and quasi-technical uses of the phrase ὁ ἐστὶ before focussing on it as the official designation for the Forms at 75 D 2: "Our argument now does not concern the equal more than the beautiful itself and the good itself and just and holy and, as I say, it concerns all those things on which we set this seal of the *what-it-is* (τὸ ὃ ἐστὶ), both in the questions that we ask and in the answers that we give" (75 C 10-d 3).¹³ Here the formula with the frozen veridical-copula ἐστὶ is explicitly set within the framework of dialectical inquiry, pursued in questions like "What is the equal?", "What is the pious?" And we have the same framework in our final passage from the *Phaedo*, the summary reference at 78 D 1-4 to the whole range of Forms as a privileged mode of being: "this very reality (αὐτὴ ἡ οὐσία) of whose being (τοῦ εἶναι) we give an account in questions and answers . . . the equal itself, the beautiful itself, each *what-it-is* (ὃ ἐστὶ) itself, true being (τὸ ὄν)." Here in four lines we have four verbal or nominalized occurrences of εἶναι: (i) the abstract nominalization οὐσία, which has no value over and above the range of meanings for the verb throughout this passage (as in 65 D 13, above), where the implicit *what-is-it?* question with veridical-definitional force (*what is it really?*) prepares for the sense of "essence" or "whatness", as in the phrase λόγος τῆς οὐσίας for "definition" (which we will encounter in *Republic* VII, but can see emerging here in λόγον δίδομεν τοῦ εἶναι); (ii) the infinitive τὸ εἶναι of which one gives an account, i.e. the *what-is-it?*

that figures as question and answer in dialectic; (iii) the frozen version of the question (or answer) as a designation for the Form: αὐτὸ ἕκαστον ὃ ἐστίν (at 78 D 4, repeated without αὐτό in the next line); and (iv) the veridical participle τὸ ὄν, originally introduced as a general designation for truth (or true reality) as the object of which philosophers are in search, but now given more precise content by the systematic use of the verb in articulating the notion of Forms in 74-76.¹⁴ (Looking back, we can see that this more specifically Platonic sense of τὸ ὄν was implicit in τῆς οὐσίας ἀπάντων ὃ τυγχάνει ἕκαστον ὄν at 65 E 1, though we did not yet have the distinction drawn between Forms and particulars. The phrase just quoted from 65 E 1 is a good example of Plato's technique of signalling to the reader in advance a doctrine which he will then proceed to develop methodically.)

Burnet (on 78 D 4) claims that τὸ ὄν is added here “to suggest the opposition of εἶναι and γίνεσθαι”. Now it is true that the opposition between what is invariable and what is changing will be formulated in the following words. But, unlike the context at *Symposium* 211 A-B, in our *Phaedo* passage the verb γίνεσθαι is not to be found; and what is directly suggested by τὸ ὄν is not so much the static or durative value of the verb as the veridical idea that has been constantly in play since the phrase was first introduced at 65 C 9. The Platonic-Eleatic conception of Being is defined by the convergence of two antitheses: 1) the opposition of Being and Seeming (εἶναι and φαίνεσθαι) which exploits the veridical value of εἶναι, and 2) the opposition of Being and Becoming which exploits the static value of the verb (in contrast to γίνεσθαι as “mutative” copula),¹⁵ the value which serves to express the idea of eternal constancy and uniformity. In characterizing the realm of change as unreliable appearance, while identifying immutability with true Reality, Plato is of course following in Parmenides' footsteps. What he has added to this Eleatic dualism (besides the much higher level of conceptual clarity in stating the theory) is to locate the point of convergence between truth and changelessness in the predicative formulae for εἶναι corresponding to the “what-is-it?” question and reflected in the phrase ὃ ἐστίν. The definitional copula, or “is” of whatness,¹⁶ thus serves as the focus for the two converging constituents of the Platonic notion of Being: the idea of true reality (as opposed to appearance) and the idea of immutable uniformity (as opposed to change or Becoming).

Hence three of the four primary linguistic functions of εἶναι in Greek — the predicative construction, the static aspect, the veridical nuance — provide essential instruments for the articulation of Plato's ontology of Forms: for a theory of οὐσία as *the reality which is truly and immutably*

what-it-is. The fourth primary function of the verb, in the existential uses, is likewise relevant; but an *explicit* statement of existence is relatively rare, and the most technical examples of such a statement are actually copulative in form: being something (τι εἶναι) rather than nothing.¹⁷

(4) The use of “to be” in the doctrine of Forms in *Republic* V-VII could only be adequately treated in an analysis of that doctrine itself. I limit my remarks here to three points noted for the *Phaedo* which we find more fully elaborated in the *Republic*: (a) the oscillation between predicative and absolute syntax for expressions of the veridical contrast between Forms and particulars, (b) the convergence of veridical and static values in the οὐσία of the Forms as true and unchanging “reality”, and (c) the copula of whatness (the οὐσία of τί ἐστι; and ὃ ἐστι) as a characterization of Forms.

(a) As in *Phaedo* 65, so in *Republic* V 476 E ff., it is the veridical notion which predominates in Plato’s use of τὸ ὄν to introduce the theory of Forms. That notion is first presented in the description of true philosophers as “lovers of the spectacle of truth” (475 E 4). The distinction between Forms and particulars, the one and the many, is then correlated with the opposition between Being and Seeming: each Form is really one, but *appears* as many: αὐτὸ μὲν ἐν ἑκάστον εἶναι, τῇ δὲ . . . κοινωνία πανταχοῦ φανταζόμενα πολλὰ φαίνεσθαι ἑκάστον (476 A 5-7). As in the verse from Aeschylus cited above, the veridical nuance of the copula εἶναι is brought out by antithesis with φαίνεσθαι, reinforced here by φανταζόμενα. But it is only at 476 E 10ff., with the use of the participial forms as objects of “to know”, that the veridical proper makes its appearance as the general designation for the Forms. (Compare *Phaedo* 65 C 3, C 9 ff. and 78 D 4, cited above). Opinions may differ, but at any rate it seems clear to me that the veridical construal gives the best sense at 477 A 1: πῶς γὰρ ἂν μὴ ὄν γέ τι γνωσθεῖν; “How could anything that is not (the case) be known?” The Parmenidean echo is unmistakable, and those readers who take ἔστι in Parmenides fr. 2 as “exists” may be inclined to do the same for τὸ ὄν in this section of *Republic* V. Hence I must briefly give my reasons for preferring the veridical reading. (1) It is linguistically the more natural: γιγνώσκειν τὸ ὄν is essentially the same idiomatic construction as ἐκμαθεῖν or συμβαλέσθαι τὸ ἑόν in Herodotus (IX. 11.3; VII. 209.1) and εἰδέναι τὰ ἑόντα in Homer (*Iliad* 1.70). (2) It is also philosophically preferable, since it gives Plato a true and non-controversial premiss (“what is known must be the case”, or *S knows that p* implies *p*) instead of a premiss that is dubious, if not false: “One cannot know what does not exist”. And why should Plato characterize knowledge as essentially or primarily *knowledge of existence*: ἐπιστήμη ἐπὶ τῷ ὄντι πέφυκε, γινῶναι ὡς ἔστι τὸ ὄν (477 B 10)? (3) It seems to me

that the reading here of *ὡς ἔστι* as “that it exists” is in fact ruled out by Plato’s own paraphrase at 478 A 6: *τὸ ὄν γινῶναι ὡς ἔχει*. Finally, (4) the shift to a predicative construction at 479 A 7 ff. (for φαίνεσθαι) and 479 B 9-10 (for ἐστί and εἶναι) would be not only unjustified but wholly unexpected if the verb had been understood existentially up to this point; whereas between the veridical and the copula the move is an easy one in both directions: from *X is (really) F* to *It is the case (that X is F)* and also from *τὸ ὄν* as *what is the case* to *τὸ ὄν* as *what is the case concerning X* (cf. *τὰ ὄντα περί τινος* at *Soph.* 263 B 4-D 2). In either direction the shift involves a type-ambiguity between things (as subjects of predication) and states of affairs (as “what is the case”, absolutely speaking). But this is not an ambiguity to which Plato is particularly sensitive, any more than Parmenides was.¹⁸

Thus I understand Plato to be saying that “knowledge naturally takes *what-is-(so)* as its object, to know (of) what is (so) that it is (so)”, ἐπιστήμη ἐπὶ τῷ ὄντι πέφυκε, γινῶναι ὡς ἔστι τὸ ὄν (447 B 10). In γινῶναι ὡς ἔστι τὸ ὄν we have the double use of the verb noted in Aristotle’s definition of truth: λέγειν τὸ ὄν εἶναι, “to say of what is (so) that it is (so)”, where the participle refers to the fact and the infinitive expresses our statement or judgment of the fact. But Plato’s γινῶναι ὡς ἔστι τὸ ὄν is ambiguous in a way that Aristotle’s λέγειν τὸ ὄν εἶναι is not: it can mean either “to know (of) what is *that it is*” (as in Aristotle’s formula), or “to know what is *as it is*”, with ὡς introducing a comparative construction as in the standard veridical (“Tell it *like it is*”). The second construction seems to be favored at 478 A 6, *τὸ ὄν γινῶναι ὡς ἔχει*, though both readings remain possible.¹⁹

Initially, then, the veridical object of knowledge is represented by an absolute use of εἶναι,²⁰ and likewise for the initial characterization of particulars as objects of δόξα: ἅμα ὄν τε καὶ μὴ ὄν . . . , τὸ ἀμφοτέρων μετέχον, τοῦ εἶναι τε καὶ μὴ εἶναι (478 D 5-6, E 1-2), “both being (so) and not being (so)”, “participating both in being (so) and in not being (so).” As we have noted, however, as the argument proceeds the construction becomes predicative, first with φαίνεσθαι and then with εἶναι: the many καλὰ will also appear αἰσχροί, the many doubles will also turn out to be halves (479 A 6ff.). So for the many particulars generally “each one of them no more *is* than *is not* what one says it to be” (πότερον οὖν ἔστι μᾶλλον ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἕκαστον τῶν πολλῶν τοῦτο ὃ ἂν τις φῇ αὐτὸ εἶναι; 479 B 9). The pure being-so (τὸ εἰλικρινῶς ὄν) of the Form *F* lies in its being just “what *F* is” (τὸ ὅ ἐστιν) and nothing else; the mixed half-way being of beautiful or just particulars lies in their being such that it is both true and false to say of each one *that it is F* (that it is beautiful or just). The particular is beautiful in

some respects, ugly in others; each one participates in the eponymous Form but also in the opposite Form. Whatever else one may find to complain of in this argument, the shift from absolute (veridical) to predicative εἶναι need not be fallacious, since the veridical value of τὸ ὄν (“what is so”) is an operator on an arbitrary sentence; and the copula use now specifies the sentence.²¹ A particular *F* participates both in being-so and not-being-so (with ὄν absolute) just because it both is and is not *F*, in other words, just because it is both true and false to say that it is *F*; whereas for a Form such a predication is true without qualification.²²

(b) When the Forms re-enter the discussion in Book VI, they are identified by the “what-it-is” formula that was used as seal or signature in the *Phaedo*: for each class of particulars we posit a single Form (ἰδέα), each of which we call “what it is” (ὃ ἐστὶν ἕκαστον προσαγορεύομεν, 507 B 7).²³ On my view, the verb in ὃ ἐστὶν represents a copula of definitional equivalence, charged with the special veridical values of (a) what a thing really is, in contrast to what it seems, and (b) what is really (unqualifiedly) *F*, as opposed to what is partially or imperfectly *F*. These values fit neatly into the epistemic context in *Republic* VI, where the one-many or Form-particular antithesis is immediately taken up by the opposition between intelligible and visible objects in the next sentence (507 B 9), and developed at length in the following sections on the Divided Line and the Cave. But this veridical and epistemic contrast between Being and Seeming, Knowledge and Opinion, is soon fused with the more properly ontological antithesis of Being and Becoming; at 508 D the region illuminated by truth and Being (ἀλήθειά τε καὶ τὸ ὄν) is contrasted with the darkness of Coming-to-be and Perishing (τὸ γιγνόμενόν τε καὶ ἀπολλύμενον), where the soul is perplexed by fluctuating δόξαι in place of clear knowledge and intelligence. And so throughout the following discussion: the terms Being (οὐσία, ὄν) and Becoming (γένεσις) serve as a standing reference to the two classes of Forms and particulars (e.g. at 525 B 5: φιλοσόφῳ δὲ διὰ τὸ τῆς οὐσίας ἀπτεόν εἶναι γενέσεως ἐξαναδύντι). Thus the terminological contrast is stative-mutative; but the interpretation of the contrast is regularly slanted towards the greater cognitive clarity and “truth” of intelligible Being (e.g. 518 C 8ff., 519 A 9 - B 4, 523 A 3, 525 C 5-6, 526 E 6, 527 B 5).

It is worth noticing that this convergence of veridical and static-immutable values finds a natural justification in the predicative construction. A particular *F* which comes to be, perishes, and changes in the meantime, is only provisionally and fitfully *F*. For Plato these time-qualifications on “is *F*” are just as damaging to the epistemic and ontological credentials of particular *F*’s as are the relative or perspectival conditions on “appearing

F” that were emphasized in the previous discussion (V 479 A-B; cf. *Phaedo* 74 B-C). Both types of disability were mentioned together in Plato’s initial statement of his neo-Eleatic dualism at *Symp.* 211 A-B.

(c) To conclude these remarks on *Rep.* VI-VII, I note the conspicuous reappearance of the what-is-X? formulation in the final description of dialectic. The kind of inquiry which “drags the mind toward οὐσία” is illustrated at 524 C 11 by the question “what in the world is the great and the small?” (τί οὖν ποτ’ ἐστί . . .;), and completed by “giving and receiving an account (λόγος)” in an investigation directed towards “just what each thing is” (ἐπ’ αὐτὸ ὃ ἐστὶν ἕκαστον), and in particular towards “just what good is” or “just what-is-good” (αὐτὸ ὃ ἐστὶν ἀγαθόν) (531 E 5, 532 A 7 - B 1). Dialectic is the only discipline which attempts systematically to grasp in every case, “concerning each thing itself, what each one (truly) is” (αὐτοῦ γε ἑκάστου περὶ ὃ ἐστὶν ἕκαστον, 533 B 2). The dialectician is the one who gets hold of the λόγος τῆς οὐσίας of each thing, the definition or explanation of *what it is*, and is able to give an account of this both to himself and to someone else (534 B 3-5). Here as elsewhere, οὐσία as object of knowledge is ultimately defined by reference to the whatness-questions of dialectic. In this culminating account of philosophic knowledge, the copula syntax of the ὃ ἐστί formula thus bears the whole weight of Plato’s ontology.

II

I turn now to uses of εἶναι in three passages where there is no mention of Forms and no emphasis on the stative-mutative contrast of Being and Becoming. The first text is a section of the *Parmenides* where the veridical value of “to be” is treated for its own sake. The other texts are two major passages in the *Theaetetus* where an absolute or incomplete use of εἶναι plays a crucial role.

(1) At *Parmenides* 161 E - 162 B, the use of εἶναι for *being-so*, as the correlate of true statement, is recognized as one sense of the phrase μετέχειν τῆς οὐσίας “to participate in being”. The passage occurs in the paradoxical derivation of contrary conclusions from the hypothesis “if the One is not”, “if the One does not exist”, εἰ μὴ ἔστι τὸ ἓν (160 B 5). For the sake of clarity I shall regularly use “exists” to translate an ἔστι which represents the predicate in this hypothesis, in order to distinguish it from uses of εἶναι that emerge in the course of the argument, and which may or may not have the same sense as the verb of the hypothesis. Our section begins with the claim that, if the One does not exist, it must nonetheless participate somehow in being. The reason given is: “It (the One) must be as

we say; for if it is not so, we would not be telling the truth in saying *that the One does not exist*. But if this is true, clearly we say what-is(-so). Now since we claim to be telling the truth, we necessarily claim also to say what-is(-so)": ἔχειν αὐτὸ δεῖ οὕτως ὡς λέγομεν· εἰ γὰρ μὴ οὕτως ἔχει, οὐκ ἂν ἀληθῆ λέγοιμεν ἡμεῖς λέγοντες τὸ ἐν μὴ εἶναι· εἰ δὲ ἀληθῆ, δῆλον ὅτι ὄντα αὐτὰ λέγομεν. . . . ἐπειδὴ δὲ φαμεν ἀληθῆ λέγειν, ἀνάγκη ἡμῖν φάναι καὶ ὄντα λέγειν (161 E 4 - 161 B 1). Slightly schematized, the argument is as follows:

- (1) If we speak truly, what we say must be the case (οὕτως ἔχειν)
- (2) If what we say is the case, we say things-that-are (ὄντα), i.e. things that are in fact as we say.

In step 1 we have a general statement of the form "if *p* is true, then *p*". This is expressed by an idiomatic variant on the veridical construction with οὕτως ἔχει in place of οὕτως ἔστι, thus making the point first without introducing the verb "to be". Step 2 provides the verb in the participial form ὄντα, "what is the case" (like ὄν in γινώσκαι τὸ ὄν, "knowing what is so", in *Rep.* V 477 B 10; cf. λέγειν τὸ ὄν εἶναι in Aristotle's formula for truth).

In the standard veridical construction, the subject of εἶναι (or τὸ ὄν) is a sentential content or proposition; and ὄντα in *Parmenides* 161 E 6, 162 A 1, seems likewise to represent an entire sentence ("whatever we say"). But Plato's use of οὕτως ἔχει in this context, although idiomatic, is veridically non-standard, since it takes as subject not a proposition but the One (αὐτό 161 E 4). This gives us a copula (subject-predicate) variation on the veridical construction: "if we say something true about X, we say how X is", or "we say something-that-is(-so) about X". The formal variation (and approximation to Aristotle's example of ἔστι as "is true") is clear in the next sentence, with ἔστι as emphatic ("veridical") copula:

ἔστιν ἄρα, ὡς ἔοικε, τὸ ἐν οὐκ ὄν (162 A 1-2)
 "The one truly *is* then, as it seems, non-existent".

In order to produce the paradox of an apparent contradiction, Plato then develops the veridical copula in both directions, affirmative and negative, so that by the principle of double negation it would follow that, if the One *were not* non-existent, it would have to exist, which is excluded by hypothesis.

εἰ γὰρ μὴ ἔσται μὴ ὄν, ἀλλὰ πῃ τοῦ εἶναι ἀνήσει πρὸς τὸ μὴ εἶναι, εὐθὺς ἔσται ὄν (162 A 2-3).

"For if it *is not* non-existent, but somehow slips from *being* (i.e. from the copula "being x") to *not being* (i.e. to "not being x"), it will immediately be existent."

To prevent this slippage a copulative "bond" is required, tying the One to

non-existence, just as there must be a negative bond to tie the existent (τὸ ὄν) to non-existence.

δεῖ ἄρα αὐτὸ δεσμὸν ἔχειν τοῦ μὴ εἶναι τὸ εἶναι μὴ ὄν, εἰ μέλλει μὴ εἶναι, ὁμοίως ὥσπερ τὸ ὄν τὸ μὴ ὄν ἔχειν μὴ εἶναι, ἵνα τελέως αὐτῇ (162 A 4-6, omitting εἶναι before ἡ, with Shorey and Burnet).

“Hence the One must possess as a bond for non-existence (its) *being* non-existent, if it is not to exist, just as what exists (τὸ ὄν) must possess not-being (μὴ εἶναι), (namely, not being) *what does not exist* (τὸ μὴ ὄν).”

This duplication of the veridical copula in negative form seems logically superfluous; but Plato’s argument aims at a formal contradiction (or apparent contradiction) between properties of the One. And for this result he needs to define not only an οὐσία corresponding to the copula in a true affirmation but also a μὴ εἶναι and μὴ οὐσία corresponding to the copula in a true negation. In what follows the text is uncertain, but the line of reasoning seems clear:

In this way the existent will surely exist and the non-existent not exist, if (a) the existent participates in *being* (οὐσίας), namely, in being existent (τοῦ εἶναι ὄν), and in *not being* (μὴ οὐσίας), i.e. not being non-existent, if it is to be wholly existent, whereas (b) the non-existent participates in the *not being* (μὴ οὐσίας) of not being existent, and in the being (οὐσίας) of being non-existent (162 A 6 - B 2, the Burnet-Shorey text).

If we now drop my stipulated translation “existent” or “exists” for the predicate of the hypothesis, and render εἶναι by “to be” throughout, we see that the argument has reached a conclusion similar in form to that of the *Sophist*, though based upon different premisses: “what-is has a share in not-being and what-is-not has a share in being” (162 B 3-4). What follows for the One here is that both Being (οὐσία) and Not-Being (μὴ οὐσία) belong to it, since (i) it *is not* by hypothesis (“it does not exist”), but (ii) the argument shows that it must also have a share in *being* something, namely, being non-existent (τῷ ἐνί, ἐπειδὴ οὐκ ἔστι, τοῦ εἶναι ἀνάγκη μετεῖναι εἰς τὸ μὴ εἶναι 162 B 5-6). Since for the One in this hypothesis the positive being is that of the (veridical) copula, whereas the negative being is that of the predicate “exists”, there is no real contradiction.²⁴

Note that throughout this section the veridical idea is expressed by a grammatical copula. Only in the participle ὄντα at 161 E 6 and 162 A 1 is the verb used absolutely, as in a standard veridical construction.

(2) At *Theaetetus* 152 A, on the other hand, where Plato quotes the opening sentence of Protagoras’ work on Truth, it seems natural to recognize the veridical proper, with the verb construed absolutely as in the formulae for “Yes, it is so”: ἔστι ταῦτα, ἔστιν οὕτω.

πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὥς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὥς οὐκ ἔστιν.
 “Man is the measure of all things, of what is (so) that it is (so), of what is not that it is not”.

We have a clear precursor for Aristotle’s own formula for truth in *Met.* Γ 7, with bivalent symmetry for affirmation and denial, and the double use of the verb: for the facts (in participial form) and for the corresponding judgment (in the finite verb).

In the excellent commentary to his translation of the *Theaetetus*, John McDowell has interpreted these four occurrences of εἶναι as instances of the incomplete copula: “a man is the measure of things which are *f*, that they are *f*, and of things which are not *f*, that they are not *f*.”²⁵ Such an interpretation can be defended on the basis of the next sentence, where ἐστὶ occurs as copula (with veridical force implied by the contrast with φαίνεται):

ὥς οἷα μὲν ἕκαστα ἐμοὶ φαίνεται τοιαῦτα μὲν ἐστὶν ἐμοί
 “(This is I suppose what he means:) that such as things appear to me in each case, just such as they (really) for me (whereas for you they are such as they appear to you).”

And in the example which follows, the question is whether or not a given wind *is cold* (152 B 6). So it is clear that in giving a philosophical exegesis of Protagoras’ formula, Plato will spell out the veridical “is” in a copula construction. But that is no reason to suppose that Protagoras himself, or Plato in quoting him, understood τὰ ὄντα ὥς ἔστι as an incomplete use of the verb, requiring some completion by a predicate word or phrase. Protagoras speaks the language of Herodotus, where the absolute use of the veridical participle is quite common. And we have seen how easily Plato oscillates back and forth between absolute and predicative constructions of εἶναι when the veridical idea is in play. In a context like *Theaetetus* 152 A-C, it is easy to understand why Plato, like a contemporary philosopher, should prefer to explicate the veridical notion by using “is” as copula. For the absolute “is” of the veridical construction is metasentential: like the adverbs “possibly” and “necessarily” it functions as syntactic operator on an entire sentence. The use of ἐστὶ in this construction presupposes some more elementary sentence to be endorsed, and any detailed discussion will have to provide a sample sentence. But the absolute use gives us no clue as to what sentence we are talking about. The incomplete copula, on the other hand, although it does not provide the whole sentence, will specify the sentence form *S is P*, and thus point the way to concrete examples. So there

is a justifiable philosophic preference for formulating the veridical idea in copula form.²⁶ If one assumes (as Plato probably and Aristotle certainly did) that every sentence can be put into *S is P* form, then the veridical *ἐστί* and the copula construction become logically equivalent, just as “*p*” is true is logically equivalent to *p*. The movement back and forth between the two forms is all the more natural if, as I have suggested, the absolute use of *ἐστί* in the veridical construction is to be understood as a generalizing abstraction from, and thematization of, the truth claim implicit in normal declarative uses of the copula.²⁷

Assuming, then, that every relevant instance of the absolute veridical can be mapped onto a copula construction, it makes no substantive difference for the philosophic analysis whether or not the verbs in the *homo mensura* formula are read as incomplete uses of the copula.²⁸ If I have taken the trouble to reassert my view of this text as an idiomatic, absolute use of *ἐστί*, that is because the veridical value of *ἐστί* emerges more clearly on this reading.²⁹ And this veridical idea is crucial for any interpretation of our second passage from the *Theaetetus*, Plato’s final refutation of the definition of knowledge that was initially supported by this quotation from Protagoras.

(3) The refutation of the thesis that knowledge is sense perception is completed at 186 C-E with the argument that knowledge requires truth, and truth requires being (οὐσία); but sense perception cannot attain to being, and hence not to truth. Therefore knowledge must be sought not in sense-experience but in reasoning and reflection concerning such experience; for it is only in this rational activity of comparison and judging (κρίνειν) that being and truth can be reached (186 B 8, D 2-5).

What is the οὐσία required for truth and knowledge, accessible not to sensation but only to reasoning (ἀναλογίσματα, συλλογισμός)? The Protagorean formula for truth, with which the discussion began, offers a natural interpretation: “being” represents (a) the facts in the world, τὰ ὄντα, the way things really are, and (b) the assertion of these facts in (true or false) judgments to the effect that things are so (ὡς ἔστι) or not so (ὡς οὐκ ἔστι). Both modes of being are required for the concept of truth as it operates in the dialogue. There must be a way the world is, and there must be a propositional reflection (correct or incorrect) of this fact in statement or judgment. (The Protagorean thesis takes the distinction for granted, in order to claim that the two modes of being will necessarily coincide.) It would be reasonable to insist that οὐσία in either sense is indispensable for truth and knowledge. But in the context of a rejection of sensation as incompetent here, and in view of the grounds cited for that rejection, it is

more appropriate to interpret $\nu\omicron\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ in the second sense: as a short-hand expression for the propositional structure of thought, provided by or modelled on language, and entailing reference, predication, and assertion. It is this structure that is required for thought to be true or false, for judgement either to tell it like it is or to tell it otherwise. And it will be appropriate to look for such a structure not in sense perception as such but in the thinking or reasoning by which we compare, calculate, and reflect upon the items in our sense experience.

On this natural interpretation, the final argument at 186 C-E is one of considerable scope and power. It bears a strong analogy to Kant's critique of empiricism, but without the burden of Kant's elaborate meta-psychology. Plato's conception of thought and judgement sticks refreshingly close to the model of silent speech (189 E - 199 A; cf. *Sophist* 263 D - 164 B). Why, then, has such an interpretation not been generally accepted, or even recognized?³⁰ The answer must lie in the rather obscure way in which the notion of $\nu\omicron\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ enters the argument, beginning with a problematic use of the verb at 185 A. We need to show that the interpretation just proposed for $\nu\omicron\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ will fit the concept denominated by $\xi\sigma\tau\iota$ and $\nu\omicron\kappa\ \xi\sigma\tau\iota$ at 185 C. And this requires a step-by-step analysis of the text. The passage falls into three parts:

A. 184 B - 185 E: the argument to show that $\tau\grave{\alpha}\ \kappa\omicron\iota\nu\acute{\alpha}$ are not perceived through the senses.

B. 186 A-C: the application to $\nu\omicron\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$.

C. 186 C 7 - E 12: the inference that, since sensation cannot attain Being and truth, it cannot be knowledge.

Section A concerns the whole range of "common" properties; Being enters only as one among the rest. It is in the short transitional passage B that the concept of $\nu\omicron\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ is most fully articulated. But that should of course be the same concept that was introduced in section A.

A. 184 B - 185 E. In order to show that the common properties are not accessible through the senses, Plato makes use of the principle of a unique one-to-one correlation between sense and object, so that "it is impossible to perceive through one power what one perceives through another, for example, to perceive through sight what one perceives through hearing" (184 E 8 - 185 A 2). This is not an ad hoc assumption, but the direct application of a standard principle of individuation for capacities or modes of cognition: if two cognitive capacities are distinct from one another, the range of phenomena studied by each will be distinct; and conversely.³¹ As applied here, the principle effectively rules out common sensibles of the Aristotelian type, defined as the object of more than one sense.

Plato's argument begins with a distinction between (a) the various bodily organs or instruments "through which" we perceive colors, sounds, and flavors, and (b) the single psychic principle on which these bodily channels converge and "by which" we perceive the corresponding qualities (184 C-D).³² The latter is, in effect, the mind, conceived here as including (but not as limited to) the unified psychic power of qualitative sense-perception. When Plato goes on to contrast the qualities perceived through individual organs with certain common properties (κοινά) applying to more than one sense, one might at first suppose he has in view something like Aristotle's distinction between proper and common sensibles.³³ But, as we have seen, this cannot be right. For Aristotle's κοινὰ αἰσθητὰ are perceived through bodily organs just like any other sense qualities: they are simply qualities perceived by *more than one sense* (DA 418a18-20). For Aristotle, the list of such common qualities includes motion, rest, shape, size, number, and unity. Plato says nothing here about motion, shape, or size. But on unity and number he flatly disagrees with Aristotle: these are not properties perceived through bodily organs at all (185 E 1, E 6-7). From Aristotle's point of view, Plato conflates two distinctions: 1) between proper sensibles, accessible to a single sense, and common sensibles, accessible to more than one, and 2) between strictly sensible input, received through bodily organs, and non-sensible input contributed by the mind or rational psyche. Since Plato's discussion comes first, he has no occasion to refer to Aristotle's view. Hence we cannot be sure whether he simply overlooked the possibility of an overlap between the objects of sight and touch or whether, like Berkeley, he would have denied that perceptions of tactile and visual space (and hence of tactile and visible shape, size, and motion) were actually perceptions of the same quality. The second interpretation is the more charitable: it implies that, for Plato, Aristotle's common sensibles are not properly sensed at all, but constructed by the mind out of its own resources. In either case it is clear that the κοινά of the *Theaetetus* are much less like Aristotle's common sensibles than they are like Kantian "concepts", contributed by the mind for the organizing of sense experience. And this is just what we would expect in the light of Plato's earlier doctrine of Recollection and the strongly Kantian slant given to this doctrine in *Phaedrus* 249 B.³⁴

The argument of section A runs as follows (184 E 8 - 185 E):

1. It is impossible to perceive through one sense what one perceives through another sense.
2. If you think some one thing concerning both what you hear and what you see, this common thing cannot be perceived either through hearing or through sight (from 1).³⁵

3. Concerning sound and color, one of the things you think about them is *that they both are* (ὅτι ἀμφοτέρω ἔστών).
4. And also you think that each is *different* from the other but the *same* as itself.
5. And that both are *two*, and each is *one*.
6. You are also able to inquire whether they are *like* or *unlike* one another.
7. For all the properties mentioned in 3-6, it is impossible to perceive them either through sight or through hearing (from 2).
8. Nor can they be perceived by some third sense, as for example if it were possible to inquire of color and sound whether or not they were both bitter (ἄρ' ἔστών ἀλμυρῶ ἢ οὐ), using the sense of taste.
9. Therefore such common properties cannot be perceived through any organ of bodily sense; it is the mind (ψυχῇ) by itself which considers these properties in relation to all things.

The soundness of this argument depends upon the truth of premiss 1, which Aristotle and other philosophers would deny. The truth of the conclusion, however, insofar as it concerns οὐσία, does not depend upon this premiss. For even philosophers who believe that some properties (like shape and motion) are perceived by more than one sense, may not wish to include Being among the common sensibles.

The question now arises, what exactly does Plato mean here by this property “which is common to all things, including these (viz., sound and color), and to which you give the name ‘is’ (ἔστι) and ‘is not’ (οὐκ ἔστι)” (184 C 5; at C 9 it is called οὐσία καὶ τὸ μὴ εἶναι; from 186 A 2-on it is simply οὐσία). The verb itself appears twice in the argument, first in 3 with an apparently absolute construction (“that both color and sound *are*”), and then in 8 as the ordinary copula: “whether color and sound are both bitter or not.” In premisses 4-6 no verb appears, but the copula ἔστί (or ἔστών) must be understood throughout. Since the subject remains substantially the same (color or sound or both), and since the two occurrences of the verb are identical in form (ἔστών), it is natural to suppose that the first occurrence has some strong connection with the implied copula in 4-6 and the explicit copula in 8. We expect the connection to be close enough for there to be a *single* concept or function of Being named by ἔστι and οὐκ ἔστι, and referred to in the list of common properties at 185 C-D. Hence a thoughtful interpreter will be tempted to explain the apparently absolute construction of ἔστών in 3 as some kind of incomplete copula, in order to impose a single interpretation on the verb throughout the argument.

But this is to read the passage backwards. Read in its place, the statement that sound and color both *are*, with no predicate in sight, must mean that both *exist*, that both are something rather than nothing. By way of introduction, the sentence with existential ἔστών serves to posit sound and color as legitimate subjects of discourse, or (in a different technical jargon) to

claim that both terms have a genuine reference. This is the natural preliminary to any further comments about them, such as the claim in 4 that each is different from the other but the same as itself. The existential reading of ἔσθ' in 3 is not only linguistically the easiest but logically the most appropriate as a starting-point for the argument.³⁶

At the same time, if I am correct in suggesting that the basic function of the existential use of εἶναι is to introduce a subject for further predication,³⁷ a Greek reader would normally *hear* the existential verb as pregnant with the incomplete copula: "there is an X" invites us to expect more, namely, "there is an X *which is such and such*."³⁸ And in fact the "existential" ἔσθ' in 3 also provides the copula for the verbless predications in 4-6. (Another case of overdetermination.) Hence Plato can return to ἔσθ' as copula in 8, with no feeling of equivocation, and then speak of ἔστι and οὐκ ἔστι as if they named a single concept from beginning to end (from 3 to 8). And in a sense there is only one concept represented by εἶναι throughout the argument, namely: being a subject equipped with predicates. The notions of existence and predication, which we distinguish as two separate logical or linguistic functions, are conceived in Greek as two sides of a single coin. The οὐσία which is introduced by the argument of section A is just the notion of Being as propositional structure that is needed for the argument of section C. The notions of reference (in the existential use) and of predication (with the copula) combine to flesh out the bare ἔστι of assertion or truth claim with the fuller sentential structure *S is P*, where *S* is given by the existence claim for color and sound, *is* represents ἔστί or ἔσθ' as copula, and the variable *P* takes as substituends "same" and "different", "two", "one", "like", "unlike", etc. Existence-with-predication, or being a subject for attributes, is indeed the *most* common property, which applies to everything there is (186 A 2: τοῦτο γὰρ μάλιστα ἐπὶ πάντων παρέπεται).

B. 186 A-C. Taking both the existential and copula uses in section A at their face value, then, we find that together they provide the notion of propositional structure capable of carrying a truth claim, which is what was required for the quasi-veridical *being-so* that fits the argument in section C. What remains to be seen, then, is whether this view can account for the characterization of οὐσία in the transitional section B, where οὐσία and its verb occur six times, and the linguistic functions of the verb seem to be more diverse.

(i) At 186 A 2 οὐσία is said to be the most common of all the κοινά. But this poses no problem for an account of Being as existence, predication, and the subject-predicate fusion of the two. As Plato notes elsewhere, even

Not-being must *be* in this sense, as a subject of which predicates can be true. (See *Parmenides* 162 A 1 - B 7, discussed above; and cf. *Met.* Γ 2, 1003b10.)

(ii) After repeating some of the κοινά previously mentioned, Socrates asks about “noble and shameful, and good and bad” (καλόν, αἰσχρόν, ἀγαθόν, κακόν), to which Theaetetus replies: “They, too, seem to me to be pre-eminently things whose being (οὐσία) the mind considers in relation to one another, calculating in itself things past and present in relation to things in the future” (186 A 9 - B 1, tr. McDowell). Here οὐσία functions as a vague nominalization for *any* relevant use of the verb. On the one hand, we could almost disregard it in translation, taking “the οὐσία of noble and base” as periphrastic for “the noble and the base” (or for “what is noble and what is base”). On the other hand, as object of the verb “to consider, investigate” (σκοπεῖσθαι), the circumlocution has the force of a phrase like “(to investigate) *the nature* of good and bad”, “to inquire *what good is*”. The verb underlying οὐσία is thus loaded not only with the existential sense (“inquiring whether there is such a thing”) but also with the (veridical) copula of whatness: “investigating their nature, i.e. trying to find out *what they really are*”. There seems to be an echo here of the Protagorean thesis formulated at 172 A-B, concerning “things noble and base, and just and unjust, and pious and impious”, that such things have no real being or truth, beyond their customary acceptance in a given society: ὥς οὐκ ἔστι φύσει αὐτῶν οὐδὲν οὐσίαν ἑαυτοῦ ἔχον (172 B 4), “that none of them exists by nature, possessing its own οὐσία.” The associated claim, that wisdom consists not in truer judgments but in having and producing more *useful* or *beneficial* perceptions (first formulated at 166 D - 167 C, echoed at 177 D ff.) was criticized by reference to judgments concerning the future (178 A - 179 B). It is this entire discussion which Theaetetus seems to have in mind in referring here to calculations about the future in the consideration of good and bad, noble and base.³⁹

After pointing out that the hardness (or hard quality, σκληρότης) of something hard and the soft quality of something soft are perceived through touch, Socrates adds: “But their οὐσία and that they are (ὅτι ἐστὶν) and their opposition to one another and the οὐσία in turn of the opposition, all this our psyche tries to judge by reviewing and comparing these things with one another” (186 B 6-9). This gives us three more occurrences of οὐσία and its verb, (iii)-(v):

(iii) The οὐσία of the tactile qualities and hardness and softness might be their *existence* (as nominalization of the existential use of ἐστὶν we found at 185 A 9, and perhaps will find again in the next words here). But the term is

more naturally taken in the sense of “nature” or “what they are” given in the immediately preceding occurrence of the noun at 186 A 10. (See under (ii), above.) The point may be that bodily sensation *feels* these qualities but only rational thought can *say what they are*, i.e. can label them as “hard” or “soft”, since such conceptualization, crystallized in words, implies a range of contrast and comparison and a generalization over many cases, which go beyond the momentary tactile experience as such.⁴⁰ In the absence of further clues, however, it seems best to take “the οὐσία of hardness and softness” quite generally, for *anything* that can be said about the nature of these qualities, including what is going to be said in the rest of this sentence.

(iv) καὶ ὅτι ἔστών: either (a) “and that they both are”, which should mean “that they exist”, “that they really occur”, as at 185 A 9; or (b) “and *what* they both are” (reading ὅ τι, as McDowell suggests, p. 111), the latter giving us either the narrow or the broad view of whatness suggested for (iii). McDowell takes the narrow view (identifying “a quality which one perceives as the quality it is” p. 191), and understands καί here as “i.e.”. I prefer to think Plato is not making the same point twice, and hence would take οὐσία as whatness (broadly construed) and ὅτι ἔστών as primarily existential. But it would be unreasonable to insist on a choice between possible interpretations here, where the basis for excluding any plausible reading is likely to be arbitrary. If Plato had wanted to *impose* a particular understanding of οὐσία and ἔστών, he would presumably have given us more clues.

(v) “And the opposition (of hardness and softness) to one another and the οὐσία in turn of their opposition.” The expression “in turn” (αὖ) suggests that the οὐσία of their opposition is related to that opposition itself just as the οὐσία of the two tactile qualities is related to these qualities. Since the opposition itself is already a conceptual κοινόν, not a bodily sensation, the relation in this case cannot be the mere conceptual *labelling* of the opposition, as in the narrow notion of whatness proposed under (iii) and (iv). This tells (though perhaps not decisively) in favor of the broader understanding of whatness both here and in (iii). Judging the opposition of hardness and softness is just comparing them and recognizing *that they are opposed to one another*. Considering the οὐσία of their opposition is asking or answering questions about the nature of this opposition: is it a matter of degree? is one term positive, the other negative? can the opposition be explained in terms of physical microstructures? and so forth.

(vi) The last occurrence of οὐσία in section B is the most general and the most emphatic. It appears at 186 C 3, in the summing up of points made in sections A and B, before the final argument of section C. On pain of fatal

fallacy, the notion of οὐσία here should be the one which figures in the final argument, since that argument begins in the very next sentence: “can anything attain truth, if it does not even attain οὐσία?”

The context is a restatement of the dichotomy between (a) those items which human beings and animals can perceive from birth, as “experiences (παθήματα) which pass through the body and reach the mind (ψυχή)”, and (b) the reasonings or calculations (ἀναλογίσματα) concerning these experiences “with respect to οὐσία and benefit (ὠφέλεια), reasonings which are acquired, by those who do acquire them, with difficulty and over a long period of time, through education and much trouble” (186 C 1-5). In what sense does οὐσία belong here next to benefit or advantage, as the goal of long and difficult training and reasoning? If I am right in suggesting that this reference to ὠφέλεια echoes the non-theoretical basis for wisdom (in what is better, advantageous, useful) proposed on behalf of Protagoras at 168 D ff.⁴¹, then οὐσία must represent the alternative, theoretical standard of *truth* or *reality*, which has been in dispute throughout the dialogue, ever since Protagoras’ Measure formula was first introduced. (For the contrast between the two criteria, see e.g. 167 A-D, esp. 167 B 4: ἐγὼ δὲ βελτίω μὲν τὰ ἕτερα (sc. φαντάσματα) τῶν ἑτέρων (καλῶ), ἀληθέστερα δὲ οὐδέν.) But if οὐσία simply *meant* “truth” here, the first stage of the following argument could do no work. Now what wisdom, training, and reasoning are needed for is *to get things right*, to judge things *as they really are*. So it is the objective standard of *how the world is*, the standard whose meaningfulness Protagoras wished to deny, that is most plausibly referred to here by οὐσία.

When thought succeeds in representing this οὐσία correctly, we have truth. The οὐσία which is necessary but not sufficient for truth should be the representational effort itself, that is, the content of the judgment or statement which *claims* to say *how things are*. In order to preserve continuity between the arguments in A and in C we must recognize that Plato does not always sharply distinguish between οὐσία as reality, or being-so in the world, and οὐσία as content of a description of reality, the being-so in a truth claim. He seems to slide here (in πρὸς οὐσίαν at 186 C 3) from the intentional to the objective *being-so*, just as he sometimes slips from knowing or saying of what-is *that* it is (ὡς ἔστι intentionally understood) to knowing or saying it *as* it is (ὡς ἔστι objectively understood).⁴² The slide is a natural one, since on a realistic (correspondence) view of truth the intentional or judgmental being-so is a direct mirroring of the objective facts. It is not obvious from the text that Plato is clearly aware of this distinction, or of the need for drawing it here. But if we do draw it for him, the argument becomes perspicuous:

1. Having knowledge entails grasping truth.
2. Grasping truth entails grasping how things are (“attaining οὐσία” objectively understood).
3. Grasping how things are entails judging that things are so (“attaining οὐσία” intentionally understood).
4. Judging that things are so (“calculating πρὸς οὐσίαν” at 186 C 3) entails a whole range of concepts, including existence (being something, as a subject of attributes), predication (being *x*, having an attribute), and truth claim (putting subject and attribute together in being-so, as a mirror of the world).

The range of concepts in 4 are all represented in the uses of οὐσία in sections A and B. In order to see how Plato could refer to them by the single term οὐσία or ἔστι, I would suggest a unifying title like “intentional being-so” or “propositional structure as a representation of reality”, where “reality” refers to being-so in the world, the objective οὐσία that figures in step 2. Since the οὐσία of step 4 (together with the other κοινά: “same”, “different”, etc.) can be found “not in bodily sense experiences (παθήματα) but in our reasoning (συλλογισμός) concerning these”, it is in the latter and not in the former that knowledge itself must be located (186 D 2-5).

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Appendix: on the grammar of ὃ ἐστι F

Gregory Vlastos, developing some remarks of A. R. Lacey,⁴³ has recognized three possible construals of a phrase like ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὃ ἐστὶν ἴσον at *Phaedo* 75 B 1-2, depending on whether (i) the verb is taken absolutely with ἴσον as subject, (ii) it is taken as copula, again with ἴσον as subject, (iii) it is taken as copula with ἴσον as predicate. These are certainly the three grammatical possibilities. I am less happy about the way Vlastos represents the alternatives. (In what follows, the words in parenthesis are added by Vlastos to Lacey’s formulation.)

- (i) That *F* which is (i.e. which really is, which is real).
- (ii) That thing which *F* is (i.e. that thing with which *F* is identical).
- (iii) That thing which is (an) *F* (or “which really is *F*”).

Here the issue of grammatical construal is confounded with problems of philosophical exegesis. In (i) the absolute construction is presented neither as the idiomatic veridical nor as the existential but as a specifically philosophic existential-veridical: “really is”, “is real”. In (ii) the notion of identity imposes a particular logical straitjacket on a copula that may be more loosely definitional (my “is of whatness”). And in (iii) the insertion of “an” before “*F*” prejudices the interpretation of self-predication in a way that Plato would not allow. It is clear that the Form *F* is in some sense the privileged bearer of the name “*F*”, so that it is conspicuously true to say of such a Form *that it is F*. But the philosophical

problem of self-predication is not to be resolved by fixing the syntax of ὁ ἐστὶν ἴσον or ὁ ἐστὶ καλόν.

I propose here to ignore the philosophical exegesis and consider only the grammatical construction. I doubt whether this is of great philosophical interest, but it is just as well to make clear what I take the situation to be. We must distinguish between (A) those passages where the relative clause is used in an idiomatic way, blended with the grammatical context, and (B) those texts where it has become a fixed formula.

Considering first (A), I do not believe there are any examples where the absolute construction (i) is the more natural reading, taken in context. There are a few examples, such as αὐτὸ τὸ ὁ ἐστὶν at *Phaedo* 74 D 6 and ἐκείνου τε ὁρέγεται τοῦ ὁ ἐστὶν ἴσον at 75 B 1, where an absolute reading (“the Equal which is real”) is possible, and might well be included by grammatical overdetermination. But since a copula construction is indicated both before (at 74 B 2) and after (ὅτι ἐστὶν at 75 B 6) this passage, it seems natural to preserve the continuity of a copula reading throughout. Thus I take τὸ ὁ ἐστὶν (ἴσον) here as literally “what is (really) equal” or “what equal really is”, leaving open the choice between syntax (ii) and (iii).

Construction (ii), with the nominal term as subject of the copula, is illustrated by at least one unambiguous example, at *Meno* 72 C 9-D 1: τὸν ἀποκρινόμενον τῷ ἐρωτήσαντι ἐκεῖνο (sc. τὸ εἶδος) δηλώσαι, ὃ τυγχάνει οὐσα ἀρετή, “the answerer will point out to the questioner (who asks ‘what is virtue?’) that form (εἶδος) which virtue really is”. (It is interesting, but grammatically irrelevant, that we do not have the standard form ὁ ἐστὶ in this example.) The same syntax seems plausible whenever the relative clause can be construed as an indirect question: “to know what *F* is”.⁴⁴ So perhaps at *Symp.* 211 C 8 (γνῶ . . . ὁ ἐστὶ καλόν, “knows . . . what beautiful is”) and almost certainly at *Phaedo* 74 B 2 (ἐπιστάμεθα αὐτὸ ὁ ἐστὶν “we know what it is”) and ἐπιστήμη αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἴσου ὅτι ἐστὶν at 75 B 5.

Clear examples of (iii), with the nominal term as predicate, are found in *Lysis* 219 C-D (ἐκεῖνο ὁ ἐστὶν πρῶτον φίλον, . . . ὁ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐστὶ φίλον), and in the *Symposium* in connection with knowledge of the Form of Beautiful (211 C 7 ἐκεῖνο τὸ μάθημα . . . ὁ ἐστὶν . . . ἐκείνου τοῦ καλοῦ μάθημα). But the first unmistakable use of this expression for a Form, in the very same context, is grammatically ambiguous, as we have seen: ὁ ἐστὶ καλόν at 211 C 8 may be “what *is* beautiful” as easily as “what beautiful *is*”. And, as we noted earlier, most of the *Phaedo* examples are similarly ambiguous (above, pp. 109ff.) The most striking fact is how often the subject-predicate syntax of the ὁ ἐστὶ clause is *underdetermined*. But that is natural enough if the formula is thought of as a definitional equivalence, an answer to the question “What is *X*?”

When we turn to (B) passages, where ὁ ἐστὶ *F* has become a fixed designation for the Forms, the situation is rather different. Some cases seem to admit either subject or predicate syntax for the noun, e.g. *Rep.* X 597 A 2: (τὸ εἶδος) ὁ δὴ φαμεν εἶναι ὁ ἐστὶ κλίνη, either “the Form which bed is” or “the Form which *is* bed”. But another example from the same context actually excludes both constructions: *Rep.* 597 C 3 μίαν μόνην (κλίνην) αὐτὴν ἐκείνην ὁ ἔστιν κλίνη, where on any grammatical reading we ought to have ἥ ἐστὶ κλίνη. What such a passage shows is that ὁ ἐστὶ κλίνη (or at 597 A 4, ὁ ἐστὶ alone) has become a frozen formula, sealed off from the syntactic context. And the same is true for the example at *Timaeus* 39 E 7: ἐνούσας ἰδέας τῷ ὁ ἐστὶν ζῶον, “Forms being present in the Real Animal”, where τὸ ὁ ἐστὶν ζῶον functions as a syntactic unit like τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι in Aristotle.

Vlastos (*loc. cit.*) has argued that at *Rep.* 597 A 4, the verb in ὃ ἐστὶ must be used absolutely, with the sense “is real”. I confess that I see nothing in the context to exclude a copula reading throughout. On the other hand, since the syntax of ἐστὶ in these frozen, formulaic examples is even more underdetermined than in the contextual uses mentioned under (A), there is no reason to rule out the absolute (veridical-existential) reading as a possible overtone. The Forms are, after all, real existent entities, as well as being truly and essentially what-they-are. But it is Plato’s general doctrine and not the grammar of the clause which justifies us in reading this meaning into ὃ ἐστὶ *F*.⁴⁵

NOTES

¹ The full veridical construction involves a clause of comparison with the verb of thinking or saying: ἐστὶ ταῦτα οὕτως ὡς σὺ λέγεις (“Things are just as you say”), or in English, “Tell it like it is!” See *The Verb ‘Be’ in Ancient Greek* (Dordrecht, 1973), pp. 334-336.

² See, e.g., John McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1973), p. 118; David Gallop, *Plato: Phaedo* (Oxford, 1975), p. 92, following G. E. L. Owen and others.

³ For this and other examples of copula with veridical value, see *The Verb ‘Be’*, pp. 356-360.

⁴ *The Verb ‘Be’*, pp. 332 with n. 2, 355 with n. 6, 359 n. 28. Thus *sons* (= ὧν) in Latin means “guilty”, *insons* “innocent”. See Ernout-Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*, s.v. *sons*. Compare the impersonal use in Greek: τὰς δίκας ἀποβαίνειν κατὰ τὸ ἐόν, “to render justice according to the facts”, in Hdt. I.97.1. Other Herodotean examples of τὸ ἐόν for “the facts” under investigation are cited in *The Verb ‘Be’* pp. 352f.

⁵ For further discussion see *The Verb ‘Be’*, pp. 186-91, 369f., 407f.

⁶ *The Verb ‘Be’*, pp. 424f.

⁷ Readers have objected 1) that ὡς ἀληθῶς (like τῷ ὄντι in what follows) can be rendered “really” or “genuinely” instead of “truly”, and 2) that hence all connection with the notion of truth is lost. I agree with 1) but not with 2). The notion of a genuine *F* is logically dependent upon the claim that something is truly (and literally) *F*. Thus fake diamonds and decoy ducks are not truly diamonds and ducks, i.e. it is not (literally) true to say that they are diamonds and ducks. A thing is really *F*, or is a genuine *F*, if and only if it is truly *F*, i.e. if and only if it is (literally) true to say of the thing *that it is F*.

⁸ Here and in what follows I ignore the orthotone accent with Burnet prints for ἐστί, presumably in those cases where he regards its use as particularly emphatic. On the accent of ἐστί, see *The Verb ‘Be’*, Appendix A.

⁹ See below, Appendix on the grammar of ὃ ἐστὶ *F*. I leave open the question whether or not it is appropriate to speak here of the “is” of identity, and thus to construe the two terms as *names*. But since in a definition the two designations of the same concept are at least logically equivalent, the subject-predicate relation can go either way.

¹⁰ See “Linguistic Relativism and the Greek Project of Ontology” (full reference below, in n. 45).

¹¹ Gallop’s translation, “Do we say that there is something *just*, or nothing?” renders the sense correctly but it is not plausible as a reflection of the syntax. (“There is something *just*” would presumably be εἶναι δίκαιόν τι). The construction is clear from the parallel at 74 A 12: φῶμέν τι εἶναι (sc. αὐτὸ τὸ ἕσον) ἢ μηδέν; “Do we say that it is something or nothing?” In this case Gallop’s translation “Are we to say that there *is* something or nothing?” seems to me wrong.

¹² This is Burnet's text, based on BT, representing a standard form of indirect question, as in *Symp.* 211 C 8. (For the use of the simple relative *ὅς* instead of the indirect relative *ὅστις* in indirect questions, see H. W. Smyth, *Greek Grammar* p. 601, § 2668; Kühner-Gerth II, p. 438, § 562.4.) The variant *αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἴσον* (in W and in margins of B and T) would be less natural, but exactly parallel to *αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι καλόν* at *Symp.* 211 C 8; cf. *τὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἴσον* at *Phaedo* 75 B 1. Such parallels explain the variant, but are not evidence for what Plato wrote here. We have the same variant at 74 D 7, with *ἴσον* after *τὸ ὃ ἔστιν* in T and a second hand of B: here Robin prints *αὐτὸ τὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἴσον*.

¹³ Burnet reads *τὸ αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστι* "the what-it-is itself", where the MSS. have *τοῦτο*, Iamblichus *τό*. I prefer to read *τοῦτο τὸ ὃ ἔστι* (proposed also by Gallop, p. 230). Loriaux keeps *τοῦτο ὃ ἔστι*, with the MSS. See R. Loriaux, *Le Phédon de Platon* (Namur, 1969), I, 151.

¹⁴ I follow Burnet in punctuating after *ὃ ἔστι* at 78 D 4, thus taking *τὸ ὄν* in apposition to all that has gone before. One might be tempted to drop the comma and read *αὐτὸ ἕκαστον ὃ ἔστιν τὸ ὄν* as "each very entity that is". But Plato regularly avoids the article with a term following (and completing) *ὃ ἔστι*. Thus *αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν χειρὶς*, *αὐτὸ ἕκεινο ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα*, at *Crat.* 389 B 5, D 6-7; *ὃ ἔστι κλίνη*, at *Rep.* X 597 A 2, C 3, C 9; *τὴν ἐν τῷ ὃ ἔστιν ὄν ὄντως ἐπιστήμην οὖσαν*, *Phaedrus* 247 E 1-2; *τὸ ὃ ἔστιν ζῶον*, *Timaeus* 39 E 8.

¹⁵ For the static-kinetic (or stative-mutative) contrast see *The Verb 'Be'*, pp. 194ff., following John Lyons.

¹⁶ For my "is of whatness" see n. 9 above. Grammatically speaking, it is clear that we need the copula construction of *ὃ ἔστι* to support the contrast between the "is truly *F*" of the Forms and the "is and is not (*F*)" of particulars. See below on *Rep.* V 478 D - 479 C.

¹⁷ See 74 A 10 *φῶμιν τι εἶναι ἢ μηδέν*; discussed above. So in earlier dialogues in introducing a concept for analysis: *Gorgias* 495 C 3-5 *ἐπιστήμην που καλεῖς τι; . . . οὐ καὶ ἀνδρείαν νυνδὴ ἔλεγές τινα εἶναι μετὰ ἐπιστήμης*; *Prot.* 330 C 1 *ἡ δικαιοσύνη πράγμα τί ἐστιν ἢ οὐδὲν πράγμα*; D 3 *οὐκοῦν φατέ καὶ τοῦτο (sc. ὁσιότητα) πράγμα τι εἶναι*; Occasionally an absolute (or quasi-absolute) existential use serves this function: *Gorgias* 450 C 4 *εἰσὶν ἡμῖν τέχναι ἢ γάρ*; So in *Prot.* 330 D 2 *οὐκοῦν καὶ ὁσιότητά τινα φατέ εἶναι* ("there is some such thing as piety"), with the same construction as in *Gorgias* 495 C 5.

For more straightforward (and less technical) existential uses in connection with the Forms see, e.g. *Phaedo* 76 D 7 *εἰ μὲν ἔστιν ἃ θρυλοῦμεν ἀεὶ*, E 2 *οὕτως ὥσπερ καὶ ταῦτα ἔστιν*, E 4 *εἰ δὲ μὴ ἔστι ταῦτα*, 77 A 3 *πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτ' εἶναι ὡς οἶόν τε μάλιστα*.

In the echo of the "seal of *ὃ ἔστιν*" phrase at 93 D 8-9, *ὥσπερ αὐτῆς* (or αὐτῇ?) *ἔστιν ἡ οὐσία ἔχουσα τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν τὴν τοῦ ὃ ἔστιν*, the translation of the first *ἔστιν* is uncertain between "belongs to it" (Burnet, Bluck) and "exists" (Hackforth, Gallop). I suspect overdetermination. But Loriaux's argument (*Le Phédon* I, 155) that *ὃ ἔστιν* too must therefore imply "une affirmation d'existence" is unconvincing—except in the sense that any true use of a copula may be thought to imply the existence of its subject.

¹⁸ I suggest that, for both Parmenides and Plato, the veridical *ἐστί* and *τὸ ὄν* ("what is the case") be understood as a conjunction of "*X* exists" and "*X* is *F*", for unspecified values of *X* and *F*, so that the veridical unfolds naturally and non-fallaciously into the existential plus the incomplete copula. The negative *τὸ μὴ ὄν* here (and *οὐκ ἔστι* in Parmenides) is to be understood as equivalent to the conjunction of two corresponding negations: what does not exist and is not *F*, for any value of *F*; i.e. what has no properties at all. (This is the view of *τὸ μὴ ὄν* that Plato will reject in the *Sophist*.)

A different "veridical" reading of *τὸ ὄν* in this passage (understood as "is true" and applied to propositions known or believed rather than to objective states of affairs) is

defended by Gail Fine in “Knowledge and Belief in *Republic V*”, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 60 (1978), 124ff.

¹⁹ Another possibility is to read *ὡς ἔστι* (or *ὡς ἔχει*) as an indirect question: “to know (of what is) *how* it is”, where *ἔστι* might be understood as the incomplete copula with *τὸ ὄν* as existential. This would be a partial reading (“to know of an existing *X*, that it is *F*”) of the full veridical, as explained in the preceding note. In this case we may speak of *under-determination* in the use of *εἶναι*, since the context leaves us free to choose between alternative readings.

For similar ambiguities see *Cratylus* 385 B 7-8, *Sophist* 263 B 4-9. At *Euthydemus* 284 C 7 the comparative construction is required: the liar *τὰ ὄντα μὲν τρόπον τινὰ λέγει, οὐ μέντοι ὡς γε ἔχει*.

²⁰ Absolute despite the adverbs in *τὸ παντελῶς ὄν, εἰλικρινῶς ὄν, μηδამῇ ὄν* at 477 A, etc. Lesley Brown has called my attention to an inadequate definition of absolute construction in *The Verb ‘Be’*, p. 240, where I admit adverbs of time but exclude adverbs of manner. (I had in mind adverbs with adjectival or predicative force, as illustrated there in pp. 150ff.) The best test for an absolute construction with adverbs would be whether the adverb is optional, i.e. whether we can recognize the same value and construction *for the verb* if the adverb is omitted. But perhaps the notion of absolute construction has a clear sense only by contrast with the nominal and locative copula, and does not admit of more precise definition.

²¹ This is an example of the veridical unfolding into the incomplete copula. I understand the argument to go as follows:

1. One cannot know that *p* if it is not (fully) the case that *p*.
2. It is not fully the case that the many *F* are *F*.
3. One cannot know of the many *F* that they are *F*.
4. One cannot know the many *F*.

The move from 3 to 4 is not explicitly made, much less argued for. But it *can* be argued for, if knowing a thing is always knowing that something is true of it. (The type-shift from state of affairs to thing as object of “to know” also occurs in the move from 3 to 4.)

²² Fallacy threatens, however, in the ambiguous use of negation. Some negative statements must be true of Forms, but Forms cannot participate in the Not-Being of *τὸ μηδამῶς ὄν*, which would make them *indeterminate*. Plato himself became aware of this ambiguity, and in the *Sophist* he rejects *τὸ μὴ ὄν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτό* as wholly indefinite and unintelligible (238 C 9, 239 C 4, 258 E 6ff.) and instead redefines *τὸ μὴ ὄν* in terms of (true) negative predication.

²³ Or “which we call ‘what each one is’”, with *ἕκαστον* as subject of *ἐστίν*. This familiar syntactic ambiguity is independent of the textual controversy (where I accept Burnet’s text and read *αὐτὸ καλὸν καὶ αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν* as object of *τιθέντες*).

Note the earlier, unemphatic use of *εἶναι* as existential (or existential-copula) applying to particulars: *πολλὰ καλὰ . . . ἕκαστα οὕτως εἶναι φαμεν* at 507 B 2-3: “We say that there are many beautiful things . . . and that in each case they exist in this way (sc. as many).”

²⁴ The *appearance* of contradiction is strengthened by an equivocation on *οὐσία* in the conclusion: at 162 B 6 (“Being turns out to belong to the one”) *οὐσία* represents the veridical copula, as throughout the preceding argument; but in the next sentence (“and Not-Being must belong to it also, if it is not”, *καὶ μὴ οὐσία ἄρα, εἴπερ μὴ ἔστιν*), *οὐσία* is most naturally taken as nominalization for the verb of the hypothesis (conventionally rendered here as “it does not exist”).

The same conclusion can be reached with the copula value of οὐσία maintained throughout if one thinks of the last sentence as elliptical: “The One must share in not-being, <sc., in not-being existent, with ὄν as the verb of the hypothesis>, if (by hypothesis) it does not exist.” Precisely this inference was prepared at 162 B 1-2 (τὸ δὲ μὴ ὄν μὴ οὐσίας μὲν <sc. μετέχειν> τοῦ μὴ εἶναι ὄν). On this reading of καὶ μὴ οὐσία ἄρα, there is no equivocation in the conclusion, though still no contradiction. The syntax, and hence the logic, is here underdetermined. (I owe a recognition of this last point to Christopher Kirwan, though he might not approve my formulation of it.)

²⁵ Plato, *Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1973), p. 118. Similarly for αἰσθησις ἄρα τοῦ ὄντος ἀεὶ ἔστιν at 152 C 5, “perception is always of what is really so,” McDowell recognizes an incomplete “is”, with complement omitted (p. 120, on 152 B 1 - C 7).

²⁶ Compare Fred Sommers’ proposal to interpret Aristotle’s formula for truth (λέγειν τὸ ὄν εἶναι) as containing an incomplete copula: “saying of what-is-P that it is P . . . , for instance saying of snow (what-is-white) that it is white”; *Review of Metaphysics* 23 (1969), p. 282, cited in *The Verb ‘Be’* p. 336, n. 7.

²⁷ See *The Verb ‘Be’*, pp. 407-409.

²⁸ It would of course make a difference if one took account of complex sentence forms (such as conditionals and disjunctions) which cannot be put into *S is P* form. This discrepancy, if pressed, would tell against the copula construction as a reading for the claim that man is “the measure of *all* things”. But probably neither Plato nor Protagoras has such complex sentence forms in view.

²⁹ This reading also connects the *Truth* of Protagoras directly with the Way of Truth in Parmenides’ poem, at least on my interpretation of ἔστι in Parmenides fr. 2 as a reflection of the veridical idiom.

³⁰ It has in fact been recognized by Myles Burnyeat (“Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving”, *CQ* 1976), who, in a final footnote (p. 50), stresses the Kantian parallel from a point of view that reinforces the interpretation proposed here.

³¹ See *Ion* 537 D 5ff., 538 A; *Rep.* V 477 D. The principle is not as implausible as some may think, if one is careful to distinguish the intentional *object* of a capacity or science, defined in terms of some theoretical description, from the *physical objects* studied, since of course the latter may overlap. Anatomists, biochemists, and students of learning theory (as well as butchers and stockbreeders) may all deal with the same animals; but one studies its bone structure, another its molecular composition, its behavior, etc. Similarly, one may both see and hear a bell; but one sees its visual appearance and hears its ring.

³² For the nature and importance of this distinction, see Burnyeat’s article cited in n. 30.

³³ See *DA* II. 6, 418a10-20; III.1, 425a14ff., with my discussion in “Sensation and Consciousness in Aristotle’s Psychology”, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 48 (1966), pp. 52-54, p. 64 nn. 48-49 (= *Articles on Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes, M. Schofield, R. Sorabji, vol. 4, pp. 8-9, 17).

³⁴ δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνιέναι κατ’ εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν λόντ’ αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῷ συναρρούμενον, “it is necessary for a human being to understand what is said by reference to a form (or kind of thing), passing from a multitude of sensations to a unity gathered together by reasoning” (*Phaedrus* 249 B 6 - C 1).

³⁵ In order to get from (1) “You cannot perceive through sense₁ what you perceive through sense₂” to (2) “if you *think* something both about the object of sense₁ and also about the object of sense₂, this common item cannot be perceived either through sense₁ or through sense₂”, another premiss is required that is not easy to spell out. McDowell (*Plato, Theaetetus*, p. 186) refers simply to “an implicit assumption about the unity of the

act of thinking". Lesley Brown (in a letter) suggests something more precise: "What applies to the object of a given sense (e.g. something *about* the object of vision or hearing) can be sense-perceived, if at all, only through the corresponding sense". Thus the brightness of a color could be seen, the loudness of a sound could be heard, but the *intensity* of each — conceived as a common property of both, for example as a ratio over an arbitrary unit — would, like number itself, not be an object of either sense.

³⁶ Compare the existential assumption that frequently introduces the dialectical consideration of a concept of Form. In addition to the examples cited above in n. 17, see *Gorgias* 454 C 7 καλεῖς τι μεμαθηκέναι; . . . τί δέ; πεπιστευκέναι;

It might be objected that the existential construal of ἐστὶν at 185 A 9 is ruled out by the introduction of the negative forms in what follows (οὐκ ἔστι at 185 C 6, μὴ εἶναι at C 9). But by then we have shifted to the copula construction (ἄρ' ἐστὶν ἄλμυρῶ ἢ οὐ at 185 B 10) and there is no focus on negative existentials. The negative forms stand for negative predications and negative propositions (or judgments), which may of course be true. But in the final discussion of οὐσία as propositional truth or reality in 186 A-C the negation would be misleading and is silently dropped.

³⁷ *The Verb 'Be'*, p. 257; cf. pp. 249, 252ff.

³⁸ This is a characteristic feature of the existential ἐστί, which we lose by translating it as "exists". Thus in a Greek sentence of the form *There is an X which is F*, we rarely if ever find ἐστί repeated in the second clause. (See *The Verb 'Be'* p. 281 with n. 47).

For the double reading of ἐστὶν at 185 A 9 compare the remarks of McDowell (p. 187) and Burnyeat (*CQ* 1976, p. 45, n. 46); in effect, Burnyeat anticipates my analysis of the syntax as overdetermined.

³⁹ McDowell (p. 190) sees a reference to 177 C - 179 in Theaetetus' remarks at 186 A 8 - B 1. I suggest that the allusion is not only to this final argument but to the whole topic of moral and prudential judgments raised at 166 D. Hence the reference to καλόν and αἰσχρόν on the one hand (186 A 8), ὠφέλεια on the other (186 C 3).

⁴⁰ See John Cooper, "Plato on Sense Perception and Knowledge: *Theaetetus* 184 to 186", *Phronesis* 15 (1970), pp. 130ff. for an interpretation along these lines. I agree with Cooper that Plato does not here make clear the status of sensory concepts like "red", "warm" or "sweet", and sometimes speaks *as if* these were directly available to perceptual awareness through the body, so that labelling a color as red, for example, would not require the *independent* contribution of the psyche (Cooper, pp. 130-134). I doubt, however, that he tended "to assimilate or confuse with one another sensory awareness and the conceptual labelling of its objects" (p. 134). In principle, that distinction is clearly drawn in the passage from the *Phaedrus* quoted in n. 34. Plato shows no special interest in sensory concepts as such, but that is presumably because they provide the weakest case for the point he wishes to make: the need for an independent contribution of the mind to any perceptual judgment that might be a candidate for knowledge. There is no clear indication in this context that Plato is considering whether a minimal sensory judgement such as "This is red" requires a concept like εἶναι; but I think his answer would certainly have been: 'yes'. Cf. *Theaet.* 183 A 6 - B 5, *Crat.* 439 D 9. If applying the concept of hardness means more than *feeling* hardness, or being able to discriminate hard things from soft, it must involve a judgment *that this is hard*. So the concept of hardness, like any sensory concept, will not be available in the absence of predication and judgement, i.e. without εἶναι.

⁴¹ In addition to ἀγαθὰ, ἀμείνων, χρηστός at 166 D - 167 C, see τὸ συμφέρον at 172 A and τὸ ὠφέλιμον at 177 D - 178 A, 179 A 5.

⁴² The slide is hard to locate precisely. At 186 A 2, οὐσία presented as the most general κοινόν seems to me clearly intentional: the existential-predicative content of judgment illustrated in 185 A-D. At 186 C 3 the οὐσία which stands next to ὡφέλεια should be objective truth or reality. The intermediate occurrences at 186 A 10, B 6-7 can perhaps be read either way.

The judgmental and objective interpretations of οὐσία are explicitly distinguished from one another in John Cooper's paper (*Phronesis* 1970, pp. 140-144), though he regards them as alternative rather than complementary.

⁴³ *Platonic Studies* (1973), p. 261, n. 102, citing A. R. Lacey, "Plato's *Sophist* and the Forms", *CQ* N.S. 9 (1959), 51.

⁴⁴ Ernst Kapp, *Ausgewählte Schriften* (1968), p. 64, suggests that this is the origin of the ὅ ἐστι formula, and that a decisive change takes place once the nominal term is construed as predicate, as in (iii).

⁴⁵ The first version of this paper was presented to Professor Aubenque's seminar on Greek ontology at the Sorbonne in February, 1980. I want to thank Pierre Aubenque for his kind invitation to address the seminar, and for thus inducing me to return to some unfinished business on *to be*. I am also grateful to Jonathan Barnes, Lesley Brown, and Christopher Kirwan for detailed comments on an early draft.

This is, I hope, my last word on *to be*. For the record I list my previous publications on this topic, in order of appearance.

1. "The Greek Verb 'to be' and the Concept of Being", *Foundations of Language* 2 (1966), 245-265.
2. "The Thesis of Parmenides", and "More on Parmenides", *Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1968-69), 700-724 and 23 (1969-70), 333-340.
3. "The Terminology for Copula and Existence", in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays... to Richard Walzer* (Cassirer, Oxford, 1972), 141-158.
4. *The Verb 'Be' in Ancient Greek* (Reidel, 1973) = Vol. 16, *Foundations of Language Supplementary Series*, ed. J. W. M. Verhaar: *The Verb 'Be' and its Synonyms*, Part 6.
5. "On the Theory of the Verb 'To Be'", in *Logic and Ontology*, ed. Milton K. Munitz (N.Y.U. Press, 1973), pp. 1-20.
6. "Why Existence does not emerge as a distinct concept in Greek philosophy", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 58 (1976), 324-334.
7. "Linguistic Relativism and the Greek Project of Ontology", in *The Question of Being*, ed. Mervyn Sprung (Penn. State U. Press, 1978), pp. 31-44, republished in *Neue Hefte für Philosophie*, 25 (1978), Heft 15/16, pp. 20-33.
8. "Questions and Categories: Aristotle's doctrine of categories in the light of modern research", in *Questions*, ed. H. Hiz (Reidel, 1978), pp. 227-278.